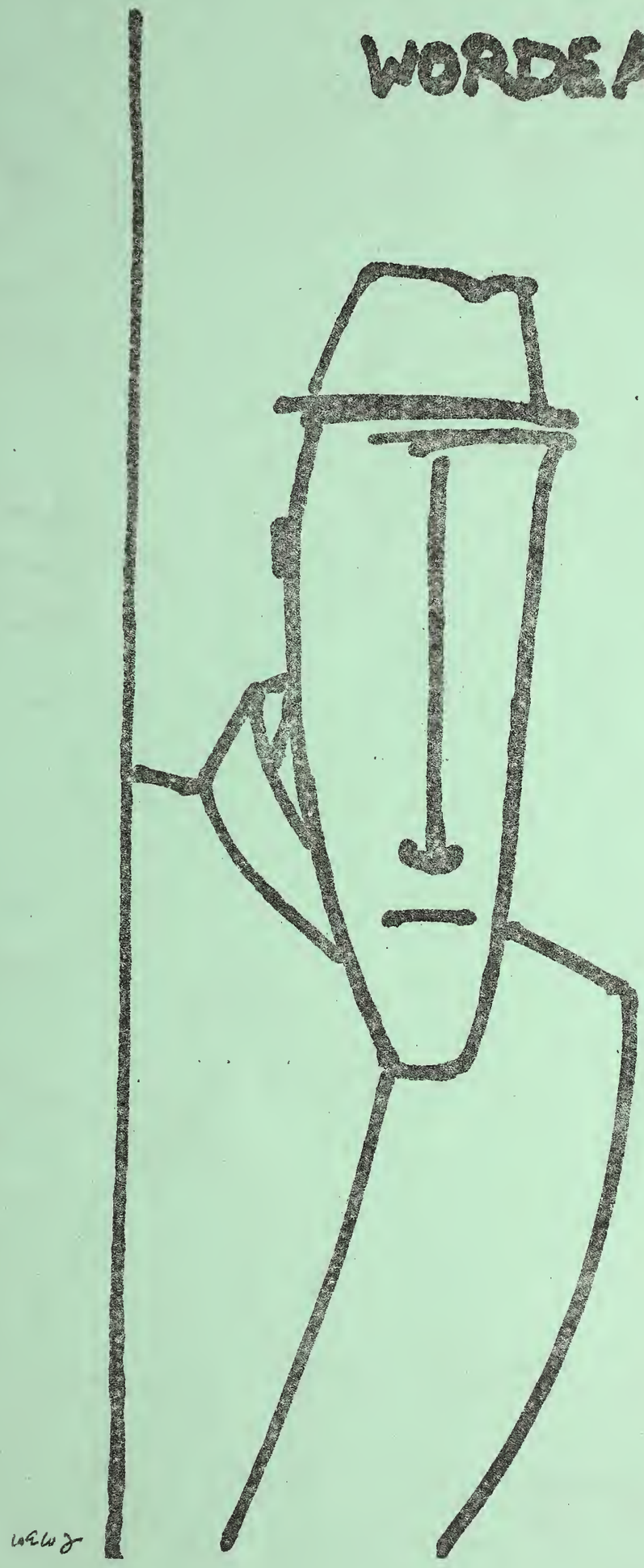
WORDEATER 5



Wordeater 50 Staff

Kim Baxa
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To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the seven people on the staff had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

Awards

Prose $25 to Shelbia Chandler

Poetry $25 to William E. Williams, Jr.

Covers $20 to William E. Williams, Jr.

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 51 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by

February 22, 1985

Manuscripts will not be returned, and SHOULD BE TYPED.

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NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

February 22, 1985
April 19, 1985

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William E. Williams, Jr.

GLANCING AROUND THE ROOM

Glancing around the room
She cuts the simple ones,
"I don't want you."
She likes the GQ boys,
Well dressed and well heeled.
Outside the chosen few,
I sit, ripped to shreds.

****

Judy Belfield

CONCEPTIONS

I made a baby once--
did some moves
sighed at all the right times
pampered the fetus growing inside--
when it came out
the baby wasn't me.

I made a painting once--
slapped the sky on with a palette knife
added some mountains
and a few trees;
when it was finished
the painting wasn't me.

I made a poem once--
put the words together in such a way
that something made you cry.
The poem wasn't me either
but I am there
between the words
just as I am
in pigment and blood.

****

William E. Williams, Jr.

SHOTGUN GLANCES TIME

Shotgun glances time
Through the window pane,
Talking is for mimes,
We'll play other games.
Listen for the pin drop
Among the rampaging herd.
Beauty is her sin, shot
The magic word.
When touching is impossible
Not even skin can feel
Things that should be plausible
Never will be real.

****

Sandy Curtis

WITH YOU

A feel good feeling is comin' over me.
I don't know what to do--
Just wanna be with you.

But there you are and here I am,
We should be standing hand in hand-
Just wanna be with you.

Touching your face and kissing your lips
Is what I hope for;
I want to know if you feel it too--
Just wanna be with you.

****

Judy Belfield

WITH RELISH

I just ate guilt for supper,
have it everyday
about this time
never get tired of it.
I fix it in a variety of ways--
cold, hot
boiled, stewed, on a skewer,
wouldn't want to bore myself
with the same old thing.

Day after day
I hoodwink my eyes
trick my tastebuds,
but my stomach is on to me,
isn't fooled by all the ruses,
been protesting for years,
threatening to get violent,
erupt in some kind of way--
I don't care . . .

Guilt is my obsession
something I can't live without--
until it kills me.

****

Shelbia Chandler

MIND GAMES

It was almost as though we were suspended in time, the only sounds being the ticking of the clock and the distant hum of traffic. I stood staring at Doug through watery eyes, feeling as though I'd been punched in the stomach. I didn't understand and I wasn't sure I wanted to.

Doug glared at me for a long time. His expression came so close to hate that I was frightened. I began to whimper and back away. His eyes reflected disgust as he turned and moved towards the window. He stood with his back to me, and the silence seemed to grow deeper.

When I could stand it no longer, I perched on the arm of the couch, determined to try again.

"Doug," I said softly, "I'm really sorry. Please believe me, I didn't want to hurt you."

He turned to face me, his eyes dark with anger. I became afraid again, but I remained determined.

"Please, don't be mad. I really do love you."

"Don't gimme that bullshit, Diane. If you really loved me, you wouldn't be pullin shit like this."

Tears poured down my cheeks as I whined, "I didn't do it on purpose, Doug. I'm back in school now, I don't need a baby."

"You're damn straight about that! The last thing you need is a baby. All you know how to do is eat, sleep, and open you legs."

The hurt seemed to multiply as I replied, "That's unfair. I work hard around here, and you know that I've gone back to school to better myself. I want to do something that pays well. I want more for myself than a lifetime of other people's housework."

"School, my ass!" he shouted. "You aint learnin a goddamn thing. The only reason you go is so you can wiggle your ass at the niggers and flirt with the teachers. You know damn well you aint thinking about no damn job. Now you come runnin to me. You got your ass knocked up and you think you can drop the shit in my lap. You think all your dreams is gonna come true. Well, Baby, I got news. It aint gonna work. You cain't run game on me.

His words cut deeply and my tears continued as I tried to speak calmly through clenched teeth.

"I resent that, Doug. I resent your whole attitude. It's highly unfair, and your accusations are unfounded."

"Miss Priss resents my attitude," he mocked. "Dammit, Diane, get up off that white girl bullshit and say what the hell you mean! Cut the crap and get off the high horse. You walk around puttin on airs, tryin to be better'en you are. It's all bullshit an' you know it. You cain't be no white chick no matter how hard you try. Your black skin is gonna always tell on you. I'm Douglas Turner, you cain't fool me cuz bullshit aint about nothin'. You aint no better'en the rest of these bitches. If you was, you wouldn't be knocked up."

Tears leaked from my eyes, but anger had replaced hurt. Doug had pushed me too far. I was too mad to be hurt.

"Let me tell you a few things, Mister! You want nigger English? Well, unfortunately, I'm not a nigger. I am black, but I'm not a nigger; however, if you want nigger English, I'll do my best to oblige.

"This I gotta see," he said sarcastically, Crossing his arms, he sat in a nearby armchair and leaned back to listen.

I took a deep breath and lapsed into the street grammar that was common to my background and foreign to my tongue.

"You pushed too hard this time. First you cuz me of gittin knocked up just so I can have you. You drop these shitty lines on me cuz you think I wants to trap you. Like you aint had nothin to do with it. Baby, you aint that big a prize."

(continued)

W. A. Kahle

IT'S OVER

While the autos whiz past me
on a busy thoroughfare,
those eyes beam in the ghastly for.
Like zombies they speed, as if
racing toward a destination of
dire significance.

My mind could care less--
the bitterness of years null
have made me as one with them
I am a person--
they are steel--
but the deadness is still there,
no senses--
no care--
and I don't know when
the last time I cried . . .

On sunny days the buttermilk clouds
have hung bravely over this head,
only their soft beauty did not matter--
my punctured soul was leaking
silent damnations aimed at
a target unexposed.

. . . Why did they have to do it?
Wasn't it discussed over and over--
death, love, life, and longevity?
My heart's hurt, refusing to cease
shooting messages of pain to this mind!

That's it--it's over.
I'll surely live somehow,
as I stroll back to that empty haven . . .
I'll drain off the pain
as I always do,
with a buzz from a few shots of scotch.

****

Doug opened his mouth to interrupt, but I wouldn't stop. I barely paused to breathe, as my tirade continued.

"You know, I aint got nobody else, but you sits there makin like you thinks I been bed hoppin. You sayin mean things and you know you got no call."

"You speakin my language, Baby, but you aint sayin a damn thing," Doug finally managed to say. He had, by now, crossed his legs and slid into a confortable position.

Leapingto my feet in total anger, I stalked to his chair and swung my right hand, intending to slap his face. He caught my hand,yanking it and causing me to fall into his lap. The feel of him caught me by surprise, and part of me wanted to stay, filling my nostrils with his after-shave. He quickly squelched the urge.

"You better watch the bullshit," he said cruelly. "You know I don't play that shit. You gonna hit me, Douglas Turner!" That's shit!"

I jumped up, sputtering, "I can't believe you! Talk about me on a high horse. Who the hell do you think you is anyway? What makes you so damned special? You cuttin me up just to be cuttin me up. When you aint playin at bein Mr. Cool, you don't use bad grammar. I aint pretendin to be nobody. I was hurt when this all started, but now I don't give a shit. I'm gonna say what I gotta say. Forget the bullshit!"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" asked Doug as he sat up straight, uncrossing his legs.

"It means, I talk the way I talk and live the way I live, and if you don't like it, go to hell," I answered.

He stared at me, but I continued.

"We've been together for six years. I've gone through hell for you. My parents didn't and don't like you. They nearly disowned me when I moved in here, but I stuck by you because I love you. When you lost your job and for six months we had to struggle just to get by, I didn't run out. I was here trying to help. I never complained about the nice things I was used to, but couldn't have any more. And I never I mean never, forced myself on you. After six years, I get pregnant, not because I want to, but because even the pill isn't foolproof. Now you turn on me, pick me apart, and screw up my motives for everything."

"Diane, I--," he interjected.

"Shut up, you bastard!" I yelled. "I'm not through yet." I reached for a cigarette and the ashtray on the coffee table. After lighting up, I sat back on the sofa and continued.

"I thought you loved me, but I was wrong."

"I do love you, Di, I--"

"Shut up, darnit! You called me a bitch. That hurt, but I refuse to hurt. All this because of a baby. You're so scared that I'll want to marry you. I trapped you, you say. I wanted to make my dreams come true. What a conceited jackass you are. I mean, that's some ego. True enough, I do love you, but not that much, Baby, not that much."

"What do you mean?" he asked quietly.

"I mean that you were right. The baby isn't yours. I been screwin around with myself. I got myself pregnant and I'm gonna deal with it. I mean, you got one hell of an ego, and I don't want to deal with that. I'm tired of struggling and scuffling, trying to please you. It's about time somebody made me happy. Since nobody else is gonna, I will. I mean, I don't want you, I don't need you, and I wish to hell I could say I didn't love you!"

I watched through tear-glazed eyes as Doug moved to sit beside me.

"Diane, please!"

I stood up and walked to the window, standing as he had before. He started to speak, but lacking the right words, said nothing.

I continued, "I may not be making much sense, but at this point, I don't care. It's hard for me to believe you love. When two people love each other, a small thing like this shouldn't throw them completely out of kilter. I only wanted to talk, I didn't say marry me."

Doug came up behind me. Placing a hand on my shoulder, he tried to turn me towards him. I refused to budge, so he gave up, just touching my shoulder.

I wanted to turn around and fall into his arms, but pride held me back. I knew he would apologize, but I couldn't accept that. He had said such cruel things and I couldn't believe didn't mean them.

"I'm sorry, Diane," he said. "I didn't mean what I said. You caught me by surprise, that's all. I love you more than ever. I know you haven't been messing around. You love me, I know that too, and really didn't mean to hurt you."

I turned around then. "I'm sorry, but I'm totally confused. I can't deal with this complete turnabout. I don't understand it, and I don't want to feel the way I feel."

"I aint lyin Diane. You know I go crazy when I'm upset, but I've never loved anyone the way I love you. God knows I'm sorry."

"What about the baby, Doug?" I asked searching his eyes.

"Get rid of it," he answered with a glint in his eye. "We aint rich, but we can afford an abortion. I don't want no snotty nose, hollerin brat runnin around here. You can have another one in a few years, maybe, but right now, it's just me and you."

(continued)

I could feel my temper rising as I said, "I'm leaving."

Going into the bedroom, I began to pack a suitcase while Doug followed, squeezing out crocodile tears.

"Baby, I don't want to lose you. You're all I got. Please don't leave me."

"Cut the crap, Doug!" I said, dripping sarcasm. "I don't want to hear it! You only want me to stay. You don't care what I want."

"What the hell do you want!" he replied, his anger returning.

"I want to keep the baby,"I said.

"Well, I'm sorry, Baby, but I can't hang. There aint gonna be no little bastard patterin his feet in my house." My anger returned in full force.

"I give up," I shouted. "You aint a man, you're a goddamned son of a bitch who doesn't give a damn about anyone but himself. This baby is part of me. I won't kill it! How can you even think of killing your child?"

Doug grabbed my arm, squeezed tightly and rasped, "It's not my child, it's your accident, and you about to have another cause I'm gonna beat the hell out of you."

"Is that a fact?" I said sarcastically.

"Yeah, indeed," he said seriously. "I'm gonna tear that ass up."

"Well, if that's the case," I said seriously, "You better kill me. If you don't, first chance I get, I'll kill you. And don't think I'll just stand here and let you beat my ass. I can't whip you, but that sure as hell don't mean I won't try."

"You bitch," he said letting go of my arm. "Go on off and have your baby, but don't come cryin back to me. I aint givin you shit! I don't wanna see it, and I hope you die on some street corner tryin to feed it. You aint shit, and you never will be."

I picked up my suitcase and walked to the front door. Doug followed. I turned around, stared into his face, and saw only hate.

"Yeah," I said. "You love me like you never loved anyone else. Well, if this is your idea of love, I'm glad to be gettin out. Think what you want, but when you see me again, I'll be more than you'll ever hope to be. You'll be happy to kiss my muddy boots."

I opened the door and turned to face Doug once more.

"Thanks for opening my eyes," I said as I walked out, closing the door on the last six years.

Six Years Later

It was almost as though we were suspended in time. Two pairs of dark eyes met in a mutual glare as the clock ticked on the mantle and sounds of the sea drifted through the window.

Doug crossed his legs and sat back in the chair, his eyes never leaving mine. I let my fingers stroke the desktop as I wished my late husband were here to handle this situation. I'd deliberately chosen his study and desk chair for [illegible] meeting with Doug. Now, sitting here [illegible]gering his desk seemed to give [illegible] strength. I leaned back, took a deep breath, and decided to make the first move.

"Well," I drawled, "fancy seeing you again. I'd always heard that a bad penny will always turn up. You're here, so I guess it's true."

Doug smirked. "I see living with the upper-crust has affected you. You fight fancy now."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Turner?" I replied in my most business-like tone.

"Oh, Mr. Turner, is it?" Doug smiled. "Look, Diane, I'm not gonna beat around the bush. It's been a long time since you left Joliet. The twins are going to school now. I'm their father and I think I deserve something."

Struggling to remain calm, I answered, "I'm not sure I understand you, Mr. Turner."

"I mean, they are my children, and I want them," he said bluntly.

"You want them," I echoed, feeling my control slipping.

"That's what I said," he answered, "and I mean to have them."

"Over my dead body!" I shouted. "Why the sudden interest? They're five years old, for Christ's sakes! Where were you these last five years? You've never even seen them!"

"Diane," he answered in a tone that I found infuriating. "Up until last month they had a stepfather who could do more for them than I ever could. He was loaded and he apparently loved them. They didn't need a father then. They do now."

"Aha," I sputtered, "the pieces begin to fit. You waltz in here six years too late, a month after my husband's funeral, and just expect me to hand my children over to you! What kind of a moron are you?"

"Diane, be reasonable. They're boys, they need a man's influence. You can't take the place of a father, and besides, you still have another child. Your little girl is about three, isn't she?"

"You know, Doug, you're an unfeeling son of a bitch. I see through you, you know."

"There's nothing to see," he replied, still calmly. "Time has passed, I've grown up, and I'm ready to take responsibility for my children."

"I'm sorry," I answered, "but I don't buy that. The change is too opportune. You just want to get your hands on the money their father left them."

"That's not true, Diane, and I'm their father."

"That, Doug, is a matter of opinion It takes more to be a father than just fertilizing an egg. You don't have what it takes."

(continued)

"That remark was uncalled for," he said angrily, "but then, you always were an unfeeling bitch."

"I, unfeeling," I answered, "that's a laugh!" It wasn't me who wanted an abortion. You hated the idea of children so much you were willing to beat the baby out of me."

"Goddamnit, Diane,"that was in the past! How can I make you see that I've changed?"

"You can't, Baby, you can't. I've got a long memory, and few people change that much. The scene between us was bad enough when I told you I was pregnant, but I remember calling you after the twins were born. You didn't even want to see them."

"Diane, I--"

"Don't Diane me," I interrupted. "What the hell can you give them now? You live in the same run-down apartment, probably doing the same odd jobs. That's no life for children. These kids have everything they could want. Their education is provided for, they have nice clothes, good food, and to top it all off, I love them."

Doug answered, "I can play ball with them, teach them to fight, and to be real men. Real men don't sit under Mama's skirttails. Real men know how to live. They can handle themselves and their women at all times."

"Your d-finition leaves a lot to be desired. I don't want my children to turn out like you. I want more for my boys than what you can give them. My children will learn the qualities their late father had."

"You dirty bitch! They're my kids, and if you call them his again, I'll bust your ass."

I laughed sarcastically. "You've changed, huh? Well, Doug, as I remember, they're not your children, but my accident. You could never win a custody battle with me, and if you think I'll give them to you, you're crazy. You can't make up for five years of rejection, and you can't give the boys a love you don't feel. Look me in the eye and tell me you love those kids!"

Doug's eyes glared into mine, but he was silent. After a time, he broke the gaze.

"I can learn," he mumbled.

"You'll never love anyone but yourself," I answered. "That's where we differ. You see, I already love Ken and Drake; they do have names, you know. I loved them before they were born, and I always will. I didn't plan on them, but I wouldn't trade them for anything."

Doug sat with his eyes on the floor as I continued.

"It may interest you to know that even if I did give up the children, you wouldn't see a penny of their money. There is a clause in my husband's will that states, If, for any reason, custody for the boys leaves their mother, their inheritance reverts to the state until they reach twenty-five.' If I remarry, the same thing happens."

Doug looked at me in amazement. Then his face crumpled, and he started to sob.

"It aint fair. You got everything. Big fine car, big fancy house, and more money that you can spend. Those bastards of yours don't need all that money; they aint even old enough to spend it."

"Listen, goddamnit," I screamed. 'Don't you never, as long as your ass points toward the ground, call my children 'bastards' or anything else. You may not love them, or me, you may not even like us, but I love those children, and like it or not, you fathered them. It aint right, and I won't have it done in my presence."

For once, Doug seemed cowed by my anger. I felt slightly sorry for him, then I remembered something.

"Doug," I said softly, "I've got all the things you mentioned, not just because I had a rich husband, but because I worked hard to be successful. I graduated from college at the top of my class, and I have written several successful screenplays.

"I'm going to give you a check for a hundred-thousand dollars. Not because I feel I owe you, or because I have any great feelings for you, but because of something that happened a long time ago."

Doug looked at me puzzled. His eyes showed despair, and his hands trembled.

"You told me when I left that I wasn't shit, and I would never be. I don't know if I told you then, but I will say now, I agree. I'm glad I'm not shit, because shit stinks. I remember telling you that one day you'd be glad to kiss my muddy boots. Let's see how right I was."

I opened a desk drawer, took out my checkbook, and wrote out the check. After I tore it out, I pushed it towards Doug. He sat, unbelievingly, for a second, then he picked it up, read it, and pocketed it.

"Now get the hell out of here, you slimey bastard. But before you go watch how you spend it. You won't get another dime from me. And if you ever come around here again, I'll have you arrested for harrassment!"

Doug stood and bolted for the door. I smiled to myself as I heard his motorcycle pull out of the drive. Then I picked up the phone, called my friend at the bank, and told her to allow Doug only a thousand on the check.

When I hung up the phone, I sat back, sighed, and gave myself a mental pat on the back. I had achieved all of my goals. My life was complete.

****

William Bowden

MISUNDERSTANDING

She thought it true love she had found
When the handsome young centaur walked her ground.
But one mold in the hay,
And he trotted away;
He was only half-horsing around.

****

Judy Lake

BEST FRIENDS

As she drove, Beth was thinking about her husband, Dave, and how glad she was to be getting away for a few days. Their marriage had been getting steadily worse for the past few months. Even though they worked together, it seemed as if they took so little time to really know each other. They were both so busy that Beth felt the romance was slowly draining from their five-year marriage. Beth knew when she went back home after visiting Sylvia, that she and Dave would have a lot to discuss. But, Beth pushed all that to the back of her mind as she turned her attention to her road map and thought of Sylvia.

Beth and Sylvia had been best friends for the past ten years. They were in the same homeroom throughout their four years of high school. Beth's name was Williams and Sylvia's was Williamson. So, on the first day of school, as freshmen, Beth was assigned the desk right in front of Sylvia. Sylvia had muttered some funny remark about their new homeroom teacher under her breath. Beth had turned around in her desk to catch Sylvia's remark and they both started giggling hysterically.

So, their new friendship had begun. They were constantly together during their adolescent shhool years and discovered they had many things in common. This mutual discovery led to numerous double dates, slumber parties, Friday night movies, and Sunday afternoon homework marathons.

They were also noticeably different in several ways which increased their mutual attraction. Beth was attractive, and was always very popular with the boys. Beth's personality was also that of a leader. However, sometimes she came across as being too bossy because of her leadership ability.

Sylvia had a tendency to be slightly overweight, and not as careful about her personal appearance as Beth. Because of this, Sylvia had low self-esteem, and Beth was constantly reassuring her self-worth, and boosting her ego. However, Sylvia was the one with the charming personality, and the easygoing nature that attracted

Valerie Radcliff

PROBLEM'S PROBLEM

A mountain of adversity
Called for a good solution.

The tried and true had failed the test
of feasibility.

A group of perplexed people
Called for an explanation.

But none of these could find
A kosher possibility.

A group of thinking people
Rendered a golden solution.

But no one cared to listen
Owing to the difficulties.

****

According to the map, Beth had approximately twenty-five more miles to drive before she reached Sylvia's house. Beth could feel the nervous excitement churning in her stomach as she thought about seeing Sylvia again. In anticipation of their reunion, she unconsciously put her foot on the car's accelerator with greater force.

Towards the end of their senior year, Sylvia got pregnant. The boy's name was Carl and he refused to marry her. Sylvia was devastated. She always had a lot of dates, but most of the boys had been interested in her as a friend only. Carl was the first young man who had shown a romantic interest, and Sylvia had fallen head over heels for him.

After graduation, Beth and Sylvia moved into an apartment together. Beth had gotten a job at a real-estate agency working as a secretary. She liked her job so well that she decided to take classes at night to obtain her real-estate license. Sylvia's parents gave her enough money to pay for her share of the rent and other expenses until after her baby was born. When her daughter was three months old, Sylvia got a job working at a movie theater in the evenings.

Six months later, Sylvia and Beth had their first major fight. One night after work, Sylvia announced to Beth that she was pregnant again.

"Silvy," asked Beth, "what the hell is going on here? One mistake I can understand, but two?"

"Please don't be mad, Beth," pleaded Sylvia. "I met him at the theater where [illegible]"

(continued

"So, is this one going to marry you?" asked Beth. "Or, is he going to dump you like the last guy?"

"I know he loves me, Beth. He's asked me to move to Kentucky with him. Thats where his family is from. We'll be leaving next week."

"But, Silvy, what do you know about this guy? Is he going to marry you or what? Silvy, do you realize what you're getting into?" Beth asked. "You can't know him very well after such a short time!"

"I know that I love him, and anything else is really none of your business!" Sylvia replied in a rare moment of anger.

"How can anyone be so stupid?"shouted Beth. When she saw Sylvia's tears, Beth apologized profusely, but from that moment, their relationship was not quite as carefree as it had been in the past.

Sylvia and the baby moved out the following week, and left for Kentucky with her new lover. She promised to call Beth as soon as she was settled in, and had a telephone.

Sylvia called her parents six months later, begging for money. Sylvia's mother called Bethand had given her Sylvia's phone number. "Please call her, Beth," Sylvia's mother had pleaded. "It sounds like she could use a friend."

Beth called Sylvia later that evening. "Hello," answered a man with a gruff voice.

"Hi," said Beth. "Is Silvy there?"

"Who wants to know?" the man asked.

"Please tell her that it's Beth calling," she answered stiffly.

"Hold on!" the man answered, and Beth heard him drop the phone on a hard surface. Beth could hear him calling Sylvia in the background, but it seemed to take several minutes before Sylvia actually came to the phone.

"Hello?" a woman answered in a voice that did not sound to Beth like Sylvia's.

"Silvy, is that you?" asked Beth "This is Beth! God, how I've missed you! How have you been?"

"OH, Beth, is it really you? It's so good to hear your voice! I've missed you, too! How'd you get my number? Oh, probably from my mother. I forgot! Beth, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Silvy. But what about you? Have you had that baby yet? Are you married now? Where are you living? Listen to me, rambling on like this! Are you Okay, Silvy?"

"Well, I havent had the baby yet, but I'm due any day now. We live in a real small town in Kentucky, and the neighbors are all real nice, too. We live in a cute trailer, and Rick's got a job working at the local Grage. I'm doing good, Beth!" Something in Sylvia's voice made Beth wonder how much truth there was to that statement.

"Silvy, why didn't you call me? You know I was sorry about all I said. I've really missed you, Silvy. When did you and Rick get married?" Beth asked.

"Well, we haven't yet, Beth, but I'm sure we will, and soon. Rick promised he'd give the baby a legal last name. I gotta go now, Beth. Rick says I gotta get off the phone. Thanks for calling! Call me again, soon, okay?"

"Sure, Silvy! Bye!" said Beth into the phone. She had wondered why Rick wouldn't let Sylvia talk any longer when Beth was the one paying for the call.

Beth spotted the fast food chicken place that Sylvia had told her to look for. She slowed the car, and turned left onto a gravel road. "It won't be long now!" Beth thought excitedly.

Beth had met Dave while attending night school. He was also studying to get his real-estate license. They sensed a mutual attraction immediately. The day they both found out that they passed their real-estate exams, they went out and celebrated. After getting slightly drunk on champagne, they went back to Beth's apartment and made love. The following month, Dave moved in with Beth and the following year, they got married. They were now, as a couple, one of the leading real-estate sales teams in the area.

Beth and Sylvia had kept in touch with Christmas cards and short, sporadic letters. Occasionally, Beth would call Sylvia on special occasions, like Easter or her birthday. Sylvia had given birth to another daughter, and sometimes would send photographs of her two girls.

Beth had not seen Sylvia once since she moved to Kentucky. Beth had wanted Sylvia to be her maid of honor at her wedding, and had even offered to pay for all of Sylvia's expenses. Sylvia never came home that weekend, though, because Rick was working overtime and wanted Sylvia at home. Beth was quite disappointed with her friend, and never quite got over her hurt.

Therefore, when Sylvia called her last week Beth was really surprised. It was the first time Sylvia had ever called. Beth had always paid for the long-distance phone conversations in the past, so Beth suspected it was something of importance to Sylvia.

Sylvia and Rick were finally getting married, and Sylvia wanted Beth to attend their wedding.

"It's going to be very small," Sylvia said, "with just a few friends. My folks are on vacation, so they won't be coming. Please, Beth, you've just gotta be here!"

Beth had a mean urge to remind Sylvia that she didn't make it to her wedding, but decided against it. "Why burst her bubble?' thought Beth. "Sure, Silvy, you know I'll be there," she said. She and Sylvia talked a while

(continued)

longer and made their plans. Then, Sylvia gave Beth the directions on how to find her trailer.

"Silvy sure did sound excited over the phone," thought Beth as she neared the street to the trailer park. "It's about time they made it legal."

Beth wheeled the car into the trailer park, and glancing at Sylvia's instructions, found the trailer with no difficulty. Beth's first impression was that the trailer and the trailer park was about the closest thing she knew to living in a garbage dump. All the trailers were shabby, and in various states of disrepair. Beth saw Sylvia staring out the trailer's front window, watching for her arrival.

Beth parked the car, and got out, as Sylvia came waddling out to greet her. "Beth!"Sylvia shouted. "You're finally here!"

"You're pregnant again!" laughed Beth. "You didn't tell me that on the phone!"

"Rick finally agreed to give this one his last name," said Sylvia. "Of course, he told me I better have a boy this time or he'll divorce me," she joked.

Beth smiled, but didn't think it was very funny. She was trying hard not to be shocked at Sylvia's appearance. Even without the added weight of the baby, it was obvious that Sylvia was at least sixty pounds overweight. Her hair was long and straggly, and Beth thought she mustn't have had a good hair cut or trim in the past six years since she moved here.

Sylvia was wearing one of Rick's yellowed tee shirts, but that was still not large enough to cover all of her protruding belly. The zipper had broken in her pants, so Sylvia had three large diaper pins holding the two pieces of material together.

"Did you have any trouble finding us?" Sylvia asked.

"No, not at all. You gave real good directions," said Beth.

Sylvia led Beth up to the trailer, and Beth noticed there was no screen left in the front door. They both went inside, and Beth wrinkled her nose as the stench assailed her immediately. "Well, it ain't much, but we call it home!" announced Sylvia proudly.

"Where's Rick?" asked Beth as she glanced about the tiny cluttered trailer.

"He's working now, but I expect him later," replied Sylvia. "He's always here in time for supper!"

"Listen, Sylvy, why don't I take you and your family out to a restaurant tonight?" Beth suggested. "It'll be my treat!" Kind of a pre-wedding celebration?" Beth knew she would have trouble eating anything prepared in Sylvia's kitchen.

"Oh, that sounds like fun!" said Sylvia. "It'll be special, too. It's been awhile since we've been out to eat."

"What are best friends for?" asked Beth as Sylvia came over and gave her a big hug.

Beth and Sylvia spent the rest of the afternoon reminiscing about their past, and playing with Sylvia's two daughters. Beth noticed that Sylvia did most of the talking. She seemed to need a good friend's listening ear.

Rick arrived home around five o' clock. As he entered the trailer, the two women were busy chattering in the kitchen. "Sylvia!" he yelled. "Bring me a beer!"

Sylvia ambled up out of her kitchen chair as fast as her obese body would allow. She went to the refrigerator for the beer and then into the front room to greet Rick. Beth stood in the doorway of the kitchen observing the couple.

"Welcome home!" Sylvia greeted him. "Look who arrived today--my best friend, Beth, whom I've told you all about."

Rick grunted a hi in Beth's direction, and Beth nodded a shy hello. "What does she see in him?" was Beth's first thought. He sported a beer belly that could match sizes with Sylvia's pregnant form. Beth was surprised because he looked as if he was in his late thirties. Beth had learned earlier from Sylvia that he was only twenty-six. He was only a year older than the two women. Of course, Beth noticed that Sylvia looked much older than her actual age too.

"Uh, honey, BEth says she'll take us all out for dinner tonight as a wedding celebration. Where would you like to go?" Sylvia asked Rick.

"No place!" he grunted. "What's wrong with our trailer? Not good enough for your classy friend?"

"Well, we can eat here, then," said Sylvia in her usual good-natured manner that Beth remembered from high school. "No problem!"

Sylvia began preparing dinner as she lumbered about the kitchen. Beth helped her set the table and washed the little girls' hands and faces. By the time dinner was ready, Rick had fallen asleep in his chair.

When awakened, he began a relentless tirade against Sylvia, blaming her for the late dinner. He continued throughout the meal, making Beth so uncomfortable that she could scarcely eat. She noticed that Sylvia did not defend herself, even once, from his ridiculous accusations.

After dinner, the two women put the children to bed, and cleaned up the kitchen. Rick went to bed still grumbling about the late dinner hour. Beth and Sylvia were talking in hushed voices as they washed the dishes.

"Sylvy, are you sure you want to marry him?" Beth asked.

"Of course, more than anything! What a silly question!" Sylvia snapped.

"Look, I'm sorry, it's just . . ."

"Just what?" demanded Sylvia.

"Well, Rick just doens't seem to act like a groom the night before his wedding. And why do you let him boss you around so much? Why don't you ever stick up for yourself?"

"Because I love him and he loves me," Sylvia stated simply.

"But, Silvy, are you sure it's love?"

"Don't you understand anything?" Sylvia asked angrily. "You're my best friend. You should know me by now. Rick has been the only man other than Carl, who has ever wanted me. You were the one with all the boyfriends, remember, Beth? It's always been easy for you, because you're so pretty. I'm not, so I have to take what I can get. And I got Rick!"

"But what about self-respect, Silvy? Can you honestly say you're happy?"

"Yes! Quit making trouble, Beth. I'm going to bed now with Rick. I know it's early, but I've got to be fresh for my wedding tomorrow! See you in the morning. Night, Beth."

"Good night, Silvy. I'm sorry," said Beth. Beth laid down on the old worn-out sofa that was to be her bed for the night. It was only nine o'clock, and she wasn't tired. Besides, her thoughts were racing.

"What are best friends for?" Beth had asked Sylvia earlier. "I'm not even sure if I know anymore," Beth thought.

Beth examined her feelings toward Sylvia and wondered if they had changed. "Silvy certainly has changed!" Beth thought. "Or has she? Even back in high school Silvy was the follower of the group. She was always well liked, but was that because she was so easily molded? It was true, Silvy usually agreed with just about anything anyone said. Was she good-natured, or just a door mat?"

"And over the past few years," Beth thought, "it's been me who usually keeps in touch. I write most of the letters and pay for all the phone calls. Silvy couldn't come back home for my wedding, but I had to run down here for hers! Then, for some odd reason, I'm made to feel snobbish because I offer to take them out to dinner. I wonder what best friends ARE for?"

Beth got up off the dirty sofa, and picked up the phone. She placed a collect call to Dave. The operator finally connected them, and she heard Dave's voice at the other end. "Beth, what's wrong, honey?"

"Nothing, Dave, nothing. It's just that I really do miss you! I'm coming home sooner than planned. I'm leaving tonight."

"Tonight? What about the wedding?" "The wedding's not that important."

"Not important? But you and Silvy are best friends!"

"Not really, Dave. I think it's always been kind of one-sided. You're my best friend, and I just now realized the fact."

"I'm your lover too, baby! Hurry home and drive safely. The champagne will be on ice, and I'll be waiting."

Beth replaced the phone and scratched out a quick note for Sylvia. "Silvy," the note read, "There's an emergency at home, so I had to leave immediately. Happy Wedding Day! You two are perfect for each other. Keep in touch--Beth."

Beth placed the note on the kitchen table with a fifty dollar bill as a wedding gift. She dragged her suitcase out to the car, and quickdy threw it in the back seat. After starting the car and putting it into gear, she headed towards the highway.

She would be home in about three hours. She smiled as she thought about being with her best friend, and she unconsciously put her foot on the car's accelerator with greater force.

William E. Williams, Jr.

TWO OLD BLACK MEN

****

Two old black men huddle around an oil can,
trying hard not to feel the wind.
Flames from burning paper brush their hands.
There's pain in warmth;
quiet nights on front porches
where soft words were spoken to gentle girls,
who giggled at each whisper of love.

****

Judy Lake

TRUE COUNTRY BLUES
OR DOES BOBBY BEAR
REALLY CARE?

I got me a brother
Don't do what he should
Ain't got a job
Don't smell too good

My ma's busy moanin'
'Bout problems and pains
My pa up and left her
He jumped a freight train

My sister's got younguns
No ring on her hand
She's foolin' around
With some guy in the band

We live like the hil billies
Down on the farm
The house is a wreck
No way to keep warm

I gotta escape
There's better for me
Someday I'll be gone
Just wait and see

My dog is the only one
I can call friend
When I split, he'll go with me
My true friend, to the end

****

Judy Belfield

LACING

Summer night
inkwashed over the city,
the hot afternoon
dropped in its tracks
faint from the sun,
languishing
in heavy honeysuckle breath.

Dreamers punctuate
the darkness--
scattered on stoops
and sidewalks
hidden from the moon
and each other
dreaming their dreams.

I would lace them all together
with a long black thread--
the dreamers and their dreams--
if I could,
just to see how much like stars
they sparkle,
how small a time they fill
between dusk and dawn.

****

W. A. Kahle

HORROR IN YELLOW

Yellow wallpaper
in an octagon bedroom
fed twisted thoughts
to the soldier who
had to stay.
Sexual concepts
like the ones
mother abhorred
to hear father tell,
stabbed his brain
over and over.

Torture inside
the iron curtain
brought back the
searing memories of
the boy--
the man, now
faced to attempt
amnesia.
Yellow! Yellow!
Stop the damned
screaming
of your color
in my eyes--
you return
haunting horror
of those bodies
butchered in the
sunlight--
crusted, rotting . . .

if only--only
the years could
reverse
back to 1927--
the year of my
fourth birthday,
when your color meant
good things:
delicious, innocent
yellow lemon drops . . .

****

Judy Lake

TIME

Time marches like an army
It never skips a beat
Changing lives just overnight
Marching on silent feet

Marching always onward
Like a soldier in the night
It gives no preference in its touch
We're all within its sight

Time can be a healer
But it also can be cruel
A schizophrenic enemy
Time and life are in a duel

****

Judy Belfield

TODAY AND YESTERDAY

Tell me, Leonardo,
when you watched the clouds long ago
and dreamed of flight,
did you peek into today?
I look at clouds
and cannot think tomorrow--
I linger on a blue lip of sky
and feel yesterday;
know these clouds are yours
though they are here and now.
Man flies, Leonardo . . .
I wish you could see.

****

Kim Baxa

AS THE SECONDS TICK AWAY

The fly swam around his head, the same fly that had hovered over his desk all year. They were old friends by now, and were equally bored with the instructor who droned on monotonously in front of the chalkboard.

He shooed away the fly because he didn't want to be bothered in his boredom. He looked down at his paper that was supposed to be for note-takin', but was decorated with doodles. He liked to think of this class not as History 101, but as Doodling 101. He and the others around him compared doodles often, and had even started to rank them on originality and difficutlty. He consistently scored the highest among the four, probably because he practiced the most.

Fred, the fly, was back appreciating the latest artwork which covered half a page.

As the year had worn on, the doodles appeared more often and the notes less.

He almost yelled at Fred to leave him alone, but he glanced up at the teacher, who was now writing something on the board, and he realized where he was, and stopped himself.

It was good to look up at the teacher every once in a while; it looked as though you cared what she was saying.

He went back to his artwork, and when he finished, he looked at it critically, and decided that it was his best yet.

Then he turned around to see the clock. One minute down, forty-nine to go.

****

William E. Williams, Jr.

A LEAF FELL

a leaf fell,
there was no loneliness.
only terror

****

Sandy Curtis

DANCING LEAVES

See the leaves dance to the music of the wind?
They dance on their toes
And twirl with delight,
Then they leap in the air
In an unending flight.
Their dance will soon be ending,
For the sky will fill with white,
And cover up the stage
Where leaves danced on windy night.

****

Judy Lake

UNTIL THAT SOMEDAY

Someday I'm gonna run away.
Drive the car
To Nowhere.
Away from you.
Away from us.
Away from All This.

I'll find a place
At the end of a rainbow,
Maybe.
Someplace,
Where all my dreams will come true.
Somewhere,
I'll find my very own spot.
Just for me,
Only me.

Until that someday,
My life remains unchanged.
So, I'd better prepare supper.

****

Judy Belfield

MOON AND YESTERDAY

Moon mood wretched
a low sax song
milk bath in blue
dissolving into yesterday
melting into a moment of whispers
long ago . . .
your soft hair
in my fingers,
your heartbeat
pulsing in my chest . . .
Now the moon
like a last guest lingering on goodbye
trying to save a final note
becomes a perverted strain
lost somewhere
in the starched pockets
of my soul.

****

W. A. Kahle

AUTUMN SHIFT

Burnt fragments
of foliage herald
another season
arrived.
Acrid smoke
clogged the air
where birds
once made
their home.

Cutting winds
sharp, cruel
have stolen the
timid spaces.
Green grounds
rich in texture—
soon to be
crystal white.
Seasons change
changing around—
continually in life
the trust
of man.

****

Judy Belfield

MID-NOVEMBER CRISIS

The middle of November
waiting for snow
agonizing over the gray
that leaked into my heart
the day after Halloween.
November is so solid--
a steel bracelet on the year
saying goodbye to yellow
with such finality.
Twelve months til next October,
twelve months again,
since the last . . .
I age myself
from All Saints Day
to All Saints Day,
make resolutions
like most people do on New Year's:
take stock of the past
see the failures
leading up to this gray.
Progress, I think, is like knowledge:
when you finally know,
you know that you don't.
The middle of November
agonizing over gray. . .

****

Kim Baxa

IN THE WINDOW

Candelabra in the window,
I see no one but myself.
Reflection, soft around the edges
Fire in the eyes
The wind cries softly
Then enters to drown the light
and the reflection is gone.

****

Judy Belfield

FROM ALENCON

This mood is lace
made in France--
not white originally
but bleached to purity
like commercial bread,
its fibers processed
and the colors of earth washed out.
This mood is lace
carefully threaded by hand
tatted strand by strand,
a meticulously plotted pattern
of flower petals--
a fine imitation of nature
with a scent and texture of its own.
I have worn lace before,
in a cathedral filled with light,
candleglow, stained-glass windows,
a radiance inside . . .
this mood is lace
but has no reverence.

****

Donna Shibovich

DEPRESSION: IS IT JEANETIC, ELECTRONIC, OR MORONIC?

The last party I went to was a Halloween party. I was content, more content than I had been in a long time. The company of my friends, the music, and the opportunity to socially mingle with monsters proved a setup for happiness. What more could I want?

I must have wanted something more because a couple hours had passed, and I was overcome by a sudden shift in feeling. The world became a blur of greyness--black at best--and my company of fake and friendly monsters evolved into a beastly burden. I then locked myself in the bathroom and began to cry. For no apparent reason, I had become the victim of a deep, "somebody-died" depression.

Once I got home and started to feel better, I decided it was time to go and do some research at the Strange Library. This library is located two blocks from the Brain Center and is on Cause-and-Effect Drive. I go to the Strange Library to find causes for, seemingly, reasonless effects. The librarian, Mr. R. E. Son, once told me, "There is no effect without a cause, and there is no cause without an effect. The absence of causes and effects doesn't lie in their nonexistence, but it lies in our ignorance."

While I was slipping through the countless aisles of this library, my attention was drawn to a book entitled Depression Without Reason? The author was a "reasonist" by the name of Cannit B. True. I took the book from the shelf and started to read. After I completed the book, I became increasingly aware of three important, but unthought of, causes for depression: jeans, electrons, and morons.

Are you depressed? Yes? No? If you are, look down,. Are you wearing jeans? If you are not wearing jeans, look around. Is anyone else around you wearing them? Mr. Cannit B. True, the reasonist, says that the activity of jeans can cause depression. Jeans contain a series of external notions which interact with our genes and with the jeans and genes of others. If we are alone, and wearing jeans, an internal depression is caused by the absence of chronos (dress pants) to carry the notions of our jeans to our brains.

It is understood that people do not wear dress pants and jeans together, so it can be concluded that all people need other people. We need both jeans and chronos to live happy, contented lives. When our world tries to make everyone wear only jeans or wear only dress pants, this loss of diversity and blocked communication triggers the depression response. When nothing comes or freshness to the brain, it gets lonely. It gets depressed.

Depression can also be caused if the jeans we wear are too tight. When our jeans are too tight, a closed, withdrawn [illegible] When in a

(continued)

tight-jean state, we will not let anything into ourselves. This isolation is the machine to manufacture sadness.

If we find our jeans and chromos not to be the cause of our depression (or, we simply don't accept Cannit B. True's research on the issue), then Mr. True suggests that we look even further outside of ourselves. Extensive research, scientifically, has been done on electrons, but a little divergent thinking and a profound knowledge led Cannit B. True to believe that electrons play a major role in depressive states. Scientists refuse to accept this, but there are three distinct types of electrons: whees, bings, and bongs.

Electrons possess very definite personalities. Cannit B. True says that we have to know which electron is which in order to understand how they effect us. Whees are very positive in nature; they are happy and loving and strive to find satisfaction. Bings are neutral and apathetic, producing a feeling of boring blankness in the environment. Bongs are extremely negative and increase turmoil whenever they can. Bongs are irrational because they drink too much alcohol and smoke too much pot.

Electrons are all around us, and they interact directly with our subconscious. There is no getting away from them. The sounds electrons make are exactly like the pronounciation of their names. Humans, when depressed, can hear electrons. Electrons are only heard when too many of one type (whee, bing, or bong) are present in a person's world.

The ideal situation is to have a balance of whees, bings, and bongs. The absence of balance causes problems. Too many whees could shut out compassion for others who have too many bongs. Lack of compassion promotes rejection; rejection brings forth depression. Having too many bongs around us interferes with our enjoyment of good things, and with the ability to accept love. Seeing the world through pessimistic irrationality would, indeed, be sad. The problem with too many bings is obvious when it occurs. If we felt no intensity in anything, and all was devoid of meaning, why would we want to live? Bings are noted for being present during suicides.

If we have looked at all the possible external causes and cannot find the source of our depression, where do we go? In his book, Cannit B. True says, "When we've looked around us to find nothing, we must look inward." Mr. True directs his introspection toward becoming aware of the things that make us sense, perceive, and feel--our morons.

Everybody has morons and everybody's morons are different. Morons sit on neurons, and help neurons carry moral messages to the brain. Our morons are a constant reminder of the things we should do and sense and perceive. Since our morons instinctively know what is good, they can only become faulty when we go against them. When we interrupt our moron-neuron harmony, we are both physically and mentally depressed. For example, if we stop our morons from telling our neurons to lift a helping hand to someone in need, we are defying the vital moron-neuron balance. We also become depressed through distrust--that includes distrust in the motives of our morons.

Cannit B. True violently scolds the use of the negative person-naming term "moron." People use that term, he says, only when they are depressed, and not in control of their own morons. We only say things are "moronic" when we do not understand them. We all have things we can't perceive, so we are all "morons." We become depressed when we look at our "moronic" qualities in a negative fashion.

After I finished reading Depression Without Reason?, I left the Strong Library, surprised and shocked by all of the causes for depression that I hadn't thought of. The most important thing I learned was that depression should not be eliminated, but it should be balanced with the other emotional systems. Cannit B. True concluded his book with the following statement: "Depression in itself is not bad; however, too much or too little of anything (including depression) causes distress."

What Mr. True says, can it be true? I think it can.

****

Judy Belfield

William E. Williams, Jr.

FACES BLEND INTO MY FINEST FEARS

Faces blend into my finest fears,
of opaque attitudes,
quoting beatitudes,
for my fine father,
dressed in black
lace,
as a hundred edited bibles
cruse the lone one

****

MYTH

Pressed like the bones of dinosaurs
between rock,
these relics
perform an ancient rite . . .
you and I
know pleasures so antique--
notes from the beginning song
played through to now
which we think is new . . .
and this is only one delusion-

****

Dan Druszkowski

SHADOWS

Causes

An ocean wet with sorrow
Stands there peering at tomorrow
In a vibrant voice it violently unfolds
Causing pains that make one suffer
For two reasons and another
It fuels the flames of stories left untold
These reasons aren't existent
But the ocean is persistent
The cause of this annoyance's unknown
The ocean casts its shadow
On a thought-provoking battle
And faces fear for reasons of its own
It tries to conquer solely
Those who deem themselves most holy
Its arrows sailing from the devil's bow
The ocean shows no mercy
Towards those of whom it's hurting
It tries to sell all good as though it's old
The reasons have been borrowed
From fictional encounters
With souls that are left burning in their homes

Like The Ocean

Shadowed by the presence
Of the evil in her thoughts
Arrows pierce the essence
Of the beauty that she sought
Dreaming in the darkness
Of the nightmares that exist
Scheming with her prowess
Yet the evil still persists
Following the walkway
Of a path that has been lost
Cowering from New days
She just laughs, the morning coughs
Vandals causing problems
Deep within her tainted mind
Afraid, she tries to end them
And she fails every time
This demon that infests
Her withered, stormy heart
Never wants to regress
'til her dreams are torn apart
This burning presence lingers
In a fashion so sincere
Selling out its anger
Like the ocean did in fear

Analogy

A death that never finished
Its taking of a life
Like a star that still exists
But has lost its light
Like paper without words
A clock that will not chime
Music left unheard
A mind is out of line
A voice that lost its sound
A sadly vicious crime, others resting in
The ground, This one's still alive

Euthanasia

Do you remember when you died: That livid
sky unleashed a storm upon you life, and
Made you cry
You had feelings and some pride
But that storm came along and you were born
Into a world torn by lies
You were welcomed into life
By killers' hands and foggy minds
That will try to torment you through time
Have you a heart that will forgive?
Show some pity towards these hands
That brought you here, gave you life, and made you live
This body you remain in
Lost and dizzy are you hoping
For a someone who'll show mercy and will sin?
Good things flowering inside you
Then they grow old and remind you
You're still here, sadly pleading to leave soon
And there's a person trapped within you
It's not yourself you don't know who
Perhaps it's just your body turning blue?
Its shower fills your soul
Flooding hopes and drowning dreams
Silent screams that close and lock the door
At one time you were whole
A body and a mind that now dysfunction
Running frightened and leave you to the old
Through the dark your eyes still stare
They can't be seen, but can be felt
Like shadows of your being in the air
There must be someone who will care
"Blest are they who show mercy;
Mercy shall be theirs . . . "

Leaving

Say hello to Jeuss for me
When you pass away
Have a drink to pass the time
There's no end to eternity
Make a toast to time without end
The holiday begins
A banquet for your welcome
Send postcards to your friends
As the devil sips his brandy
Pass right by his eye
His leisure will destroy him
No disciples to recieve
A sinner crying at your side
"Take me there with you"
Clear your heart, prepare your charm
Are you ready now to die?

Deliverance

The morning rests in memory
The burning pain has gone away
A stone casts shadows in the breeze
Shading hands that have been tamed

Some songs sang by some sages
In rhythm with awaking minds
Their keys unlock the cages
That silence sound throughout all time

The shadow is in unity
With mind and body on this day
Storms now sleep peacefully

(continued)

Shadows, continued

Their dying colors fade away

The book without its pages
The clock without its time
The spirit trapped for ages
Now flows freely into life

****

Judy Belfield

APPARITION

Cathy in chiffon
prancing the moor
scooping heather into bundles
for her arms,
looking back to the stone palace
trying to see Heathcliffe
with warm smiling eyes
softening in the twilight
pleased with the vision.
"Pretend," she whispers,
longing for him
to share the fantasy
but he never does . . .

I kept on dreaming
til the night ended
and a smoky morning
swirled in coffee
scalded my tongue

I can't even whisper.

****

Kim Baxa

TRACES OF A SHADOW

Among the shadows
  a tear glides softly,
    slowly down.

First a whisper,
 then a shout

Crying out in desperation
  the cry is lost
in the traces of a shadow.

****

Donna Shobovich

I READ THE SING

I read the sign:
NO Right Turn
But . . . . .
No one ever said
NO Wrong turn--
so excuse me
I believe I have
the wrong of way.

****

W. A. Kahle

CAR CRASH

She stands in the wind--
a stone of the ages,
emotion erased
from outer view.
No more smiles
to stretch across the lips
of the woman struck,
damaged deepest--
raped of her very intelligence.

She stand in the wind--
a diamond eroded,
fastened to a rusted post.
Those murky eyes
holding back horrors
of the family destroyed--
annihilated by a force
known well.

She stands in the wind---
an ancient, decrepit house,
once elegant and loved,
a sightly panorama
now worn, withered,
weather-beaten as time
and fate joined powers
with glass and speed--
to crack her vulnerable mind . . .
the crack exploded one night,
her family vanished
somewhere in the vicinity
of infinity.

She stands in the wind--
changed, altered,
never the way she was.
She's surely alive, existing--
but simultaneously dead . . .

****

Dan Druszkowski

I AM AS THOUGH I WERE NOT

Secluded in the darkness of my world, I began to feel uneasy about the purpose of my being. I had a dying feeling deep within myself. It was as though I was no longer deemed important to existence, and I was a mere nuisance to the lives outside my world. I began to ask questions. These questions were answered by a hypnotic voice that provided temporary security with its absence of direct concern.

"What is dying like?" I asked.

"Oh, dying?" the voice asked. "You need not be concerned with such ideas as dying of yet, my young soul. How can one die when one is yet to be born?"

"If I am yet to be born, how is it that I am alive?"

"Are you? There are those who would argue with you on this matter, saying, my son, you are not alive."

"Then how is it that I can function as though I were alive? Surely I am, by definition, alive!"

"Many do agree and sympathize with your opinion, but through the genius of the recognized living, there are definitions of life that can be made to outweigh the most solid evidence suggesting the opposite."

"So, I'm left to the mercy of others."

"Correct."

"Should I not be given the opportunity to tell my story to those who wish to kill me?"

"You have not the capabilities to communicate with your fellow beings."

"How then can I speak with you?"

"You are not speaking, my child, Yes, we are communicating, but not through the use of any physical faculties."

Soon, I felt they would come for me, and end my existence that was yet to be. I would be only a slight memory in a few minds, and forgotten within a brief lapse of time. How cruel this all seemed. I needed a means of escaping this fate though it appeared there was only one path to existence, but it was blocked by time and unrelenting decisions. Nothing could be done about the pace of time, but decisions could be changed or delayed. There wasn't a way to change the decision that decided my fate that I was capable of employing. I needed to stall for time.

"Hello?" I said.

"What's your problem now?" the voice demanded.

"I know you're busy, and I don't want to bother you, but . . . "

"But what?"

"I have an idea. If I could just . "

"Stall for time?"

" . . . stall for time. Must you be so rude at times?"

"Don't shout at me, my son. I can hear you. Please go on."

"I need help with carrying out this idea."

"Now listen," the voice continued. "It's obvious that death worries you. You need not be so worried. Do you not think I am capable of caring for you? If I were to assist you into recognized existence, you may never hear my voice again. If all depends upon whether or not you want a challenge or a free pass."

"You make this all seem so easy."

"That's my job."

"I would not want your job."

"I don't blame you. It can be pretty demanding at times."

"So what should I do?"

"Well, don't apply for this position if I should . . . "

"No, about my situation."

"Oh, excuse my oblivity. Oblivity? Is that a word? I'll have to confer with Mr. Webster about this one. If it's not a word, it really should be . . . "

I felt this conversation wasn't going where I had hoped it would. I was growing tired. Time hadn't the same value between myself and the voice. I tried to display my boredom, but the voice continued.

"I wonder, whoa, wondering gets myself into trouble," it said. "Just let my imagination on its own for a few days, and pow! I end up with more work and problems than planned. Let's see now, what can I do for you? Oh, yes , the young soul on death row."

The voice rambled on for what seemed like months. It spoke of many things that seemed to be in no way related to the crisis at hand--my death.

Perhaps the voice was getting old, and senile. This was a possibility, and it concerned me. Despite my blatant attempts to cut short the voice's side of the conversation, it continued.

" . . . Oh, wait one moment. It wasn't 1277, but 1265. Or it might have been the year 1262. You know, there's a different date for every day, and that makes it difficult to remember just what happened and when . . . "

"Forgive my interruption, but you're not helping me."

"Havent I? I've only been rambling on for only I know how long, successfully stalling for time on your behalf. There isn't anyone who can cause you harm when you're in my presence. Oh, my confused young soul, it looks as though you may be born!"

****

W. A. Kahle

BOOZED BLINDNESS

Amber bourbon
Soaks the brain
With accomplishment.
A lie? Of course.
Why? Who cares--
Buy me another drink.

Whirling colors
Pass the eyes
That do not care.
The truth? You bet.
Okay? No way . . .
But buy me another drink.

Wretching bellies
Are so vulgar
And nauseate.
Pleasant? Nope.
Disgusting? Yes!
And please, will you buy me another drink?

Bloody bodies
Litter highways
With death and agony.
Catastrophic? Certainly.
Horrifying? Absolutely!
So buy me another drink.

Over-packed cemeteries
Frequent American lands
With young alcoholic passings.
Lovely? Never!
Appreciated? Impossible--
And shut up and buy me another drink!

****

W. A. Kahle

PERILOUS KNOWLEDGE

Flowers,
a sea of tulips
viewed en route
to the sanitarium
makes going nuts
funny.
An old hag
with worn-out
jeans and a
man's flannel
shirt, brims
over a garden
of color . . .

while I sit
in a steel-barred
car with cuffs
on these shaking
hands--
I'm not crazy!
More sane than
a cop on duty,
still strung-out
from last night's

Kim Baxa

THE EDGE OF DARKNESS

Fading in
Fading out,
Bits and pieces
are remembered.
  a face here,
  a voice calling,
The fog hides all.

Struggling to see
  where no light
  can penetrate.
Fighting against
  the darkness.
Ripping aside
  slowly and steadily
  only to find
    more darkness.

****

Judy Belfield

COMING TO NAUGHT

Time, a man older than himself,
strength surpassing
the exaggerations of myth or epic,
pushes us ahead
with a cold, silent sweep of an
deaf to flattery
blind to the smiles of children
and the wink of seasons
effortlessly propelling . . .

I would stand and face him,
see the trail that led to here
and shake my fist in anger;
I would know the futility
of such rebellion,
being moved forward all the while
I raved and spat,
and so, decide,
the only way to win
is compromise
but never learn
that compromise is my world
and Time
has not heard it.

****

pot party.

. . . Go ahead--
throw me in
a soft cell--
toss that
rusty key into
a safe to lock . . .
for I know a truth
no one will ever
accept:
the Russians are coming!

****

W. W. Kahle

THE NOVELIST

I create people
for fun.
I make lives
unique--
adventuresome.
I have lived
a thousand pages--
with thousands yet
to go . . .
Pieces of me
will never die,
they'll live eternally.

In an hour or so,
I'll take one
a century away,
allowing millions
to dream.
I lust
after language--
demanding more words
to print.

I am a wizard
with settings--
possessing scores
of scenes.
None will ever
totally know me--
my secrets too
vast to register.

My hobby
is observation.
I watch--
I ponder--
I transform--
denting or delighting
hearts
of those I vision--
designed to be
shared . . .

. . . with you

****

Valerie Radcliff

RULERS

Ants and bees
Ruled the grasslands
With a busy hand.
Cats and dogs
Ruled the alleys
With a warring hand.
Lions and bears
Ruled the forests
With an iron hand.
Donkeys and elephants
Ruled the nation
With a thoughtless hand.

****

Judy Belfield

FORE/FOUR/FOR-WORDS

Foresight gives urge
to foretell
some situation foreseen
perhaps, four-score
into the future.
Nostradamus, certainly,
(or at least, reportedly)
had eyes
that saw through his today
into his tomorrow
which is our now--
some of it;
some still waits to happen,
if it will.
Foreknowledge, covered by time,
is somewhat chameleon--
we can make it fit
by altering the seams a bit,
like Armageddon
and the Second Coming,
which is, after all,
only a half or doubled foreclosure--
not to mention
a half-nelson
on forever.

****

W. MA. Kahle

LANGUAGE IN A ROOM AT MIDNIGHT

In a state of absolute silence
one mind slows down, stops.
At midnight,
the switch is pulled--
there is only a single sound:
Tick-tock...tick-tock...tick-tock...

The room speaks in its language
the accent's known but unacknowledged.
At midnight,
the speech is begun
in a graphic tongue
no human can create:
Clink...clink...bonk...tonk...

The symphony is hushed, so coy,
careful not to disturb its occupant.
At midnight,
the room's master rests
as one tune drowns out the others:
Tick-tock...Tick-tock...Tick-tock...

Some know, some don't
supposedly a secret,
rooms talk, homes sing,
in language
officially undiscovered-
Think--
remember--
the dialogue will come to mind,
when silent in sharp thought
it's there:
Tick-tock...clink...Tick-tock...bonk...
Tick-tock...tink...Tick-tock...tonk...

****

Kim Baxa

WHEN MIDNIGHT CEASES TO EXIST

When midnight ceases to exist
the spirits fly
and children dance

Fantasies are born anew
and every dream
will have a chance

Celebrations overflow
and every face
holds a smile

When midnight ceases to exist
each tear
sentenced to exile

Celebrations will grow weary
and soon each
smile will fade.

Happiness will lose
all meaning and
no new ones will be made.

There can never be
a wrong without
a right.

When midnight ceases to exist
the sun shall
shine less bright.

****

Kim Baxa

MY DEAREST DAUGHTER

"My Dearest Daughter,
I am writing this to you on the day of your birth for you to read on your 18th birthday. Why am I writing this, you may ask. I am writing to tell you of my hopes, my dreams, my happiness, my fears, and my worries. I also hope that you can gain a little wisdom from this letter."

He never knew that she had written a letter for Stephanie. He just came upon it by accident while cleaning out the closet. It was in the small wooden letter box that he had given Lora for their first wedding anniversary.

Oh, could he remember the day Stephanie was born! No one could forget such a pivotal moment in one's life.

They had been married about a year and a half, and couldn't have been happier. Then, they found out that Lora was pregnant, and they were happier. He was in the delivery room with Lora, and he had more pains in hsi abdomen than she because he was so nervous. Then, there she was, their beautiful little girl. He held her so long that it almost took as long to take her out of her arms as it did to deliver her.

"I just want you to know that I am happier at this moment than I have ever been in my entire life. I have just given birth to a new, wonderful, beautiful human being. But, more than

(continued)

W. A. Kahle

ISSUES

Cars--
monoxide spreaders
soaking lungs
in poison.
Smoke--
thick and streamy
pouring out of mouths
that rot with disease.
Alcohol--
flooding brains
in lethal oblivion.

Dead babies--
cut out, trashed
by mothers
of the era.
Murder or choice?
Wrong or right?
Decisions of
minds too many.

Moral immoralities,
simplistic complexities--
in a world so
barbarically bombarded
with issues.

****

W. A. Kahle

ANTHEMS

The liner sailed into the harbor,
releasing hundreds of needy men--
save one--
who possess the rhythm of life.

Groups of aged widows gathered along
the shore,
each poor in currency flow--
save one--
holding the key to the rhythm of life.

At a bar near near Clark and Main,
a crowd of couples drank bourbon--
save one--
wishing the others know of the rhythm
of life.

A playground was spotted with children,
who all desired to get along--
save one--
that was brought up thus far with the
rhythm of life.

The funeral brought grief and sorrow to
eighty faithful friends
regretting the deceased's untimely end--
save one--
the loved-one that died with the rhythm of life.

****

that, you are your father's and my child. You are a part of your father, your are a part of generations of people, yet are also complete and separate from any other person that has ever lived or will live. Because of this very fact that you are you, I love you very much. As for my hopes and dreams, one has already been met; you are complete, whole, and healthy. I hope you remain that way for a long, long time. I want that you are happy and content all of your life, and that you never have to worry about when or where or how the next meal will come.

"Your father and I want to give you the best possible start on life by giving you a home, an education, and all the love we have to give."

Nine years old she was, their little Stephanie. Hard to believe how fast she grew. He could still see her at five with pigtails hanging out from under her baseball cap, and yet she was a little princess in her dresses. When she was four, she was so very curious. She had big, brown eyes that seemed to want to takeeverything and analyze it all. One time, she asked him as they were driving in the country, "Why do the leaves fall off the trees?" He tried to answer as best he could, but she always replied, "Why? After about five minutes of "Why?" he gave up and said, "I don't know."

She turned her pert little nose and pouting mouth to him and said, "Daddy, I thought you knew everything."

They tried to have more children, but it never happened. Stephanie never lacked playmates though, if she wasn't with her little friends, the three of them were together. Not only were they close to Stephanie, but he and Lora became closer too.

"I suppose than one reason I want to write something for you is to teach you one thing. One thing that is important to know while you are young and still have an entire life ahead of you. One lesson that you can always remember and know that I gave to you to help you in life.

"You have just come to the age when you are looked upon as an adult, and your whole life is stretched out before you. Don't let your youth fool you. If time was fair we would all have enough time to do everything we ever wanted, but it isn't fair. Go outand get what you want, don't hurt others in the process, but if you want something, you have to work for it now."

Her ninth birthday, last Tuesday. He was in the office when he got the call.

"Hello," said the voice, "is this Mr. Westman?"

"Yes, this is, may I help you?"

"This is Liettenant Batson, I think you should sit down. It's about your wife and daughter. I'm sorry . . ."

The words echoed in his ears, his very would dropped to the floor. His heart shrank to the size of a grape as it wrapped around itself and cried. Then it swelled his body as it screamed. The rest of what the lieutenant had to say was muffled by his sorrow.

"They were shot and killed during a a robbery at a small corner store. You will have to come down and make a positive identification. You should probably have someone drive for you."

There was only silence.

"Mr. Westman?" Click. Mr. Westman had let the receiver fall into the cradle. He sat in his chair for an eternity. Mark, a friend from the office, asked him if he was okay. Mark ended up driving him to the morgue, the police station, and then home. When he got home, he just sat, hugging Stephanie's presents and crying. Mark stayed with him until someone could come to be with him.

The next few days passed as though they were a dream, a nightmare. First he had to notify all their relatives and friends. Then, he had to endure the wake he stood there as people talked to him about Lora and Stephanie and the words just hung around his head like a cloud, never penetrating.

He was dead, empty inside and didn't want to be consoled and comforted. The funeral was worse; he couldn't bear the thought of putting them in the ground. After the funeral he had to stand by and listen as everyone told him to go on with his life. How could he, though, when his life was just buried?

At home, he was lost, alone with too many memories, and too much food. No one thought he could take care of himself and so, they were right, he couldn't take care of himself.

Yesterday, he looked in the mirror and saw a very sad man. His beard was scraggly and his eyes sagged. They were hollow and empty. That night he had a dream in which Lora said to him "Snap out of it. You have to start going on with your life. Don't let our lives have been a waste. Live again. Now."

So, today, he cleaned up and began packing a few things away, which is when he found this letter.

"Don't make the mistake of waiting until tomorrow, because tomorrow may not wiat for you.

Remember that I will always love you.

Mom"

Lora was right as usual. He would start living again . . . but he would start tomorrow.

****

Judy Belfield

PASSED DOWN

Flat, shadowed earth
stretching out to black sky--
an Indian stood here once,
looked across the flat land
to the night horizon
into a turban of stars.
He didn't see neon
or electric
didn't hear power bristling
through cables strung from latticed towers
trailing off to a generating station.
But he may have wondered
about his nightlights
the same lights here
beyond the neon
and electric--
in that moment
he left his soul
to the wind
and I feel it now
trembling in sleep.

****

Kim Baxa

TRICK OR TREAT & MERRY CHRISTMAS

NEWS FLASH: Christmas and Halloween are not neighboring holidays.

Every year, it seems that Christmas follows closer and closer behind Halloween, not to mention Thanksgiving. You remember Thanksgiving, it's part of the pre-Christmas festivities where you get together with the family members you haven't seen in a year, and eat as much food as you can.

I have often asked why it is that Christmas season comes sooner each year, but the only answer I get is that I'm just getting older. But, I think it's more than that. For example, I saw an ad for a camera that had a Christmas tree in the background, and this was Halloween night!

Don't get me wrong, I am not a bah-humbug, but I do have difficulty singing Christmas carols while I am polishing off the last of the Halloween candy.

Of course, there is someone to blame for the hurried Christmas season--the Christmas Fanatics.

These are the symptoms of a Christmas Fanatic:

Someone who:

--has their Christmas shopping done before Thanksgiving.

--unpacks the Christmas decorations in November "just to see if they are all there."

--has the freezer filled with cookies and candies for Christmas by December 1st.

--gets the Christmas records (all 50 of them) out in November to "dust them off and listen for scratches."

There are more Christmas Fanatics out there than some people might think. One sure sign is the house that has Christmas lights still up in mid-January. Hopefully they will not find out that they are not a dying breed. They might band together and elect my mother as president.

It was a week before Thanksgiving when I came home from work and heard some music playing in another room. It sounded familiar, but I couldn't remember where I had heard it. As I got closer, I realized that what I was hearing was Christmas music.

One year in early October, my mother dragged out a couple of bags and began showing me Christmas presents that she had already bought.

But, I knew she was a true Christmas Fanatic when she announced one year that we would be buying an artificial Christmas tree. I didn't think it was a good idea, and argued that she couldn't destroy a family tradition. Every year, I knew it was almost Christmas when the whole family went out searching and fighting for the "perfect Christmas tree." We could spend hours looking at trees which always seemed less glorious once we got those same trees home. It was no use arguing, though. She was prepared.

1. It will be less of a fire hazard.
2. There won't be needles falling all over the floor.
3. We can pick out a nice tree, and know that we will have a beautiful tree every year.
4. There are never any really nice trees anymore anyway.
5. We can pay for it once, and then we won't have to worry about spending money for a tree each year.

Even with all her well-worded arguments, she didn't fool me. I knew the real reason why she wanted an artificial Christmas tree. She wanted to be able to put it up earlier and take it down later.

With my mother leading the pack, the Christmas Fanatics may soon make Christmas in July a reality.

****

William E. Williams, Jr.

For B

a voice
that cripples
my nightmares

****

Judy Belfield

CIRE PER DIEU*

I cannot be molten bronze
poured into a mold;
I would turn green
before I had become cold--
I could not do it
even for Rodin,
though I lost a chance at immortality.
I cannot fit myself
into that space
where the wax waits
to be replaced;
cannot agree
that this curve
is where it should be.
I will be ore--
crude,
in my own studio,
shaped, if ever,
by accident.

*Process, in art, of molding bronze

****

Judy Belfield

FOR ALL THE JEFFS

He wears a brown jacket
and chews gum.
His hair is blonde
styled by a professional.
Yellow stitching
on his breast pocket
tells me his name is Jeff.
I see him passing the window,
just another leaf in the wind.
I watch now
and soon forget.
Jeff, did you ever think
you could be so insignificant?
That you could pass so easily
into someone else's life
for a few seconds
and then out forever?
Had you looked my way
I might have considered
my own insignificance
instead of, as it happens,
my own absurdity.

****

William E. Williams, Jr.

ROXANNE

There's intermittent sounds
of something going wrong,
hard against the concrete,
as lights too bright,
darken the view
of a soft young girl,
leapt upon in cars-
Her short black hair,
magnetic,
attracting every clumsy hand.

****

WANTED
WORDEATER 50